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ST 501 Method and Praxis in Theology

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SYLLABUS FOR ST501 EXL
Larry Wood, Professor

ST 501 METHOD AND PRAXIS IN THEOLOGY.

This is an introductory course relating method to practice in theology. This course will involve an examination of different ways in which the Christian tradition has understood the sources, norms, and criteria for the development of church doctrine. Special attention is given to a critical analysis of contemporary theological methods and the influence of postmodern science. The connection between theological method and Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of divine revelation, will serve as the foundation for developing an Evangelical\Wesleyan theology in the postmodern world. This class is designed for beginning students, and it serves as preparatory study for all course offerings in theology and doctrine.

Wesley once said to his preacher that the study of logic was the single, most important study next to the Bible if they were going to understand the Bible properly and to preach it effectively. This class is similar to a course in logic because its purpose is to help students develop the categories necessary for understanding the theological implications of the Word of God. If the Bible is to be understood in a thoughtful and practical way, theological method is helpful because it is like a tool that enables the Scriptures to be user-friendly as we study and interpret them for our day.

Praxis is an important component of this course. As a technical term, praxis means applying method to the concrete formulation of doctrine. What does it matter if one has a good method but does not develop an understanding of doctrine? We will examine a number of theologies, showing how various methods influenced the way theology is developed.

LEARNING GOALS:

Upon completion of this course, the student will have an introductory knowledge of critical theological method, enabling them to:

1. Describe how classical Greek\Roman philosophy influenced the manner in which the Early Christian Apologists and the Early Church Fathers did theology;
2. Articulate the impact of the Enlightenment upon modern theology, particularly the influence of Kant's philosophy and its contribution to such movements as liberalism, existentialism, and neo-orthodoxy.
3. Describe the rise of the modern historical consciousness, particularly the relation between critical history and Christian faith;
4. Understand the significance of the transition from premodern to modern and postmodern thought, with special reference to the shift from ontology (premodern) to epistemology (modern) to hermeneutics (postmodern);
5. Identify the keypoints in the transition from modern to postmodern paradigms, especially hermeneutical phenomenology, postliberalism, and deconstructionism;
6. Articulate the influence of postmodern science upon theological method;
7. Appreciate Wesley's methodical use of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience;

8. Apply critical theological method to the effective practice of Christian ministry in the postmodern age.

TEXTS AND REQUIRED READINGS

1. Donald Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), pp. 125-225. This is an excellent work on Wesley's methodological assumptions. Asbury Theological Seminary is a confessional school of theology. Though we do not think that all schools ought to be confessional, the founding fathers decided Asbury would be established primarily to train students in the Wesleyan tradition. Thorsen is a distinguished alumnus of Asbury, and his work on Wesley's methodology will introduce the student to the distinctive features of the Wesleyan way of doing theology.
2. L. Wood, *Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Interpretation*. This manuscript will be made available online in each of the modules. Learning to think theologically assumes that one has a basic grasp of the substantive issues in theology. This means one must be acquainted with the way that theology has been done since the earliest days of Church history. Because the key methodological issue of Christian theology is related to its historical claims, the focus of this work is on the relationship of faith, history, and hermeneutics. This work is being written specifically for this new core course.
3. L. Wood, "Does God the Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne," *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 56.2-57.1 (Fall 2001 – Spring 2002): 24-47 [notice these assigned pages do not include the entire article]. The concept of divine foreknowledge is a highly debated issue in contemporary philosophy and theology. Related to it are the implications of relativity physics and the big bang theory. Science and religion have always involved in tensions, and this article illustrates how the two disciplines interface with each other.

HERE ARE SOME "RECOMMENDED READINGS"

THAT WILL OCCASIONALLY BE REFERENCED (Not required)

1. William Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998)
2. Henry H. Knight III, *A Future for Truth, Evangelical Theology in a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997). An excellent overview of contemporary theology with a traditional Wesleyan focus.
3. E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is* (Archon Books, 1970). Mascall offers a traditional interpretation of Christian revelation in contrast to some modern alternatives, especially offering a critique of process theology with its view that God's personhood is always in the process of being formed.
4. R. G. Mitchell, *Einstein and Christ, A New Approach to the Defence of the Christian Religion* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987). This book is written for "young people" between the ages of 16 to 26 and for those who are "perplexed" by some of the theological implications of postmodern science. Chapter 2, "Clearing Terms and Concepts" (pp. 8-45), is especially helpful.

This chapter explains the idea of Einstein's theory of relativity and its implications for theology, especially the doctrine of eternity.

5. John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology*, Second Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998). This book is a study in the doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ, incorporating contemporary perspectives as well as highlighting the classic tradition. Chapter 1, 2, and 3 (pp. 3-80) offer various methodologies for determining the meaning of Jesus' personhood.
6. Jürgen Moltmann, *Experience in Theology, Ways and Forms of Christian Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000). This work uses an autobiographical method for assessing contemporary theological trends. It describes Moltmann's personal interaction with the various theologies espoused in the postmodern period.
7. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991). This is a helpful introduction to the relevance of systematic theology, emphasizing the importance of coherent models of reality that assist in understanding the Triune Faith of the Church.
8. Ted Peters, "Theology and Natural Science," in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), pp. 649-665. This essay offers eight ways of relating science and theology.

REQUIREMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS

1. Students will stay up-to-date in assignments.
2. Each student will be assigned to a team. The purpose of these small groups is to provide students with a structured opportunity to develop more fully their understanding of the issues.
3. Each student will read the essay, "Does God Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne?"
4. Each student will read Don Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral*.

GRADES

For a grade of "C"—

1. Students will answer the study guide questions and participate in the interactive discussions on time. The purpose of the questions and discussions is to encourage students to develop their understanding of the material and to interact with it in a critical and constructive manner.
2. Each student will view the PBS video, "The Creation of the Universe."
3. Each student will complete the assigned readings and notify the professor of having done so at the end of the semester:
 - a. Thorsen, *The Wesley's Quadrilateral*.
 - b. L. Wood, *Faith, History, and Hermeneutics*.
 - c. L. Wood, "Does God Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne?" *The Asbury Theological Journal*.

For a grade of "B"—

1. Each student will do all the above requirements for a grade of "C."

2. Each student will write an interpretative term paper on theological method and praxis (8 to 10 pages double spaced).
 - a. It is assumed that each student knows the mechanics of a term paper. Please follow *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Be sure to *organize* the paper around a *purpose statement* with *supporting* documented sources.
 - b. Each student should use at least three sources, which may include the assigned readings and texts for this course.
 - c. An interpretative paper means students will develop their understanding of what theological method entails and what particular theological method they prefer. For example, if the student thinks that the idea of salvation history as understood by Cullmann is the best option, the student should explain why he/she think so. Or if one thinks narrative theology as practiced by Stanley Hauerwas is best, the student will defend their reasons for this option.

For a grade of “A”—

1. Do all the above requirements for a grade of “C” and “B.”
2. Write a eight-page reflection paper on the nature of spacetime and its implications for belief in God, based on:
 - a. The video, “The Creation of the Universe,” produced by PBS and available in local video stores in the educational division, or it can be purchased through Amazon.com for \$11.00 (used) or \$14.95 (new).
 - b. L. Wood, “Does God Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 56.2-57.1 (Fall 2001, Spring, 2002): 24-47.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Feb 10

L. Wood, *Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Evangelical Interpretation*, Volume 1 (manuscript). Weeks 1-5 are from this first volume.

Introduction

Part One

The Ancient and Pre-Modern Background

Chapter 1. The Emergence of Historical Consciousness And Critical Thinking

Mythical Thinking in the Ancient Near East

Nature-Spirit Distinction in Hebrew Thought

The Emergence of Critical Thinking in Greek Philosophy

The Socratic Method
 Aristotle's Concept of God as Self-Knowing Mind
 Some Differences Between Plato and Aristotle
 The Monism of Stoicism—The Philosophical Fusion of Subject and Object
 Plotinus—Divine Oneness and Mystical Pantheism
 The Contrasting Views of the Hebrews and the Greeks
 Origen: A Synthesis of Christian Revelation and Greek Philosophy

Chapter 2. Athens or Jerusalem? The Academy or the Church?

The Chalcedonian Settlement and the Subject-Predicate Distinction in Aristotle's
 Logic
 Aristotelian Categories as an Explanation of Jesus' Unity with God and Man
 The Concept of Personhood in Trinitarian Theology
 The Formulation of the Concept of Personhood

Chapter 3. The Invention of Scientific History

Greek Substantialism as Anti-Historical
 The Contribution of Early Christian Theology to Scientific History
 The Universal Concept of History in the Medieval Period
 Humanistic Historiography of the Renaissance
 The Modern Concept of Critical History

Week 2- Feb 17

Part Two

Epistemological Dualisms in Modern Philosophy

Chapter 4. Cartesian Historiography: The Beginnings of the Modern Historical Consciousness

Descartes: Methodological Skepticism
 Pierre Bayle: Historical Positivism
 Spinoza: Reason and History
 Spinoza As The Founder of Biblical Criticism
 Richard Simon: Faith vs. Historical Certainty

Chapter 5. The Logic of Probability and Individuality

Leibniz: The Concept of Historical Probability

Lessing: The Fallacy of Misplaced Necessity
 Herder: The Categories of Individuality and Relativity
 David Hume: From Probability to Skepticism
 Truth: Subjective, Objective, or Dialectical?

Chapter 6. Kant: The Comprehensive Dualism of Modernism

Kant's Critical Philosophy and the Enlightenment Project
 The Knowledge Box
 History Excludes Divine Revelation by Definition
 The Faith Box
 The Refutation of Natural Theology
 The Moral Argument for God's Existence
 God As A Regulative Idea

WEEK 3—FEB 24

CHAPTER 7. HEGEL: ABSOLUTE KNOWLEDGE AND WORLD HISTORY

Hegel's Critique of Kant
 The Objectivity of Truth
 Is Hegel's Philosophy a Pantheism?
 Reason vs. Feeling—Hegel or Schleiermacher?
 The Reconciliation of Reason and History, God and the World
 Is Hegel's Philosophy A Faithful Interpretation of Christianity?
 Does Hegel Turn The Concept of God into An Abstraction?

Chapter 8. Heidegger: Truth as the Self-Disclosure of Being

Overcoming the Subject-Object Split
 Being and Dasein
 A Hermeneutic of Dasein
 Being, Historicity, and Temporality
 Being and Truth
 $\Phi\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in Early Greek Thinking
 Λόγος in Early Greek Thought
 Heidegger and Contemporary Theology

WEEK 4—MARCH 3

Part Three
 Dualisms in Modern Religious Epistemology

Chapter 9. The Dualisms of Kierkegaard

Thought and Being
 Paragraph-Material and Existential Communication
 Quantitative Approximation and Qualitative Dialectic
 Faith and Knowledge
 Eternity and Time, The Moment and The Historical
 God and Humanity

Chapter 10. Martin Kähler: The Historical Jesus and the Historic Christ

Chapter 11. Rudolf Bultmann: The Divorce of Historie and Geschichte

Chapter 12. Gerhard Ebeling: “Pure Word” and “Mere Fact”

WEEK 5—MARCH 10

Chapter 13. Wolfhart Pannenberg: A Critique of the Natural-Supernatural Dualism of Modern Theology (end of volume 1)

Faith, History, and Hermeneutics: A Post-Critical Evangelical Interpretation, Volume 2 (Weeks 5-10).

Preface

PART FOUR

The Integration of Faith, History, and Hermeneutics

Chapter 1. Beyond the Modern Concept of Revelation

Jesus Christ As The Only Revelation
 The Different Meanings of the Word of God
 The Bible As A Witness to Revelation
 A Critique of Barth’s Concept of Self-Revelation
 Self-Revelation As Indirect Rather Than Direct
 Story or History?

WEEK 6—MARCH 17

Chapter 2. The Historical-Critical Method and Biblical Inspiration

Fundamentalism and Biblical Literalism
 American Evangelicalism and Biblical Inspiration
 Pannenberg and Post-critical Evangelicalism
 Historical Events and The Word of God

Form Criticism and The Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration
 N. T. Wright and The Historical Critical Method
 The Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit

WEEK 7—MARCH 24

Chapter 3. Beyond the Modern Concept of Selfhood—A Relational Ontology

John Macmurray: “The Failure of Modern Philosophy”
 Paul Ricoeur: A Narrative-Based Ontology
 Toward A Relational Ontology
 Jean-Paul Sartre: Human Nature (Substance) or Human Condition?

Chapter 4. Beyond The Modern Concept of Truth

Richard Rorty: A Critique of Modernism
 Polanyi: A Post-Critical Philosophy
 Jean-Francois Lyotard: A Critique of Metanarrative

Chapter 5. Pannenberg’s Theology of Universal History

Reality As History
 Theology and The Historical Method
 Pannenberg’s Theology of the Resurrection
 The Historical-Critical Method and Jesus’ Resurrection

WEEK 8—MARCH 31

Chapter 6. History And Hermeneutics

Schleiermacher—The Psychologizing of Hermeneutics and Authorial Intent
 Dilthey: The Critique of Historical Reason
 Bultmann: The Pre-Understanding of Human Existence
 The New Hermeneutic of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs
 Pannenberg: The Integration of History and Hermeneutics

Chapter 7. Paul Ricoeur’s Phenomenological Hermeneutics

“To Believe Again”
 Hermeneutic Phenomenology
 Biblical Language As Poetic
 Testifying Truth
 A Hermeneutic of Revelation
 The Autonomous Text, Not Autonomous Reason
 A Reader-Response Theory of Interpretation

The Deconstructionism of Derrida
Transcending Postmodernism

WEEK 9—APRIL 14

Chapter 8. Postliberal Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology

Theology As Realistic Narrative
The Cultural-Linguistic Approach
Stanley Hauerwas and Narrative Theology

Chapter 9. Hermeneutics, Ideological Criticism, and Liberation Theologies

Latin American Liberation Theology
Black Liberation Hermeneutics
Feminist Liberation Theology

WEEK 10—APRIL 21

Chapter 10. Moltmann's Concept of The Trinitarian History of God

Moltmann's Multidimensional Model of Experience
The Perichoretic Unity of the Trinity
The Modern Concept of Person
Trinitarianism As Panentheism
The Panentheism of American Process Thought
The History of God
The Postmodern Relevance of Moltmann's Doctrine of the Trinity

Week 10—April 18

Chapter 11. Faith And The Criterion of Truth

Hermeneutics Replaces Epistemology
Canon and Criterion—William Abraham
Scripture As Canon or Criterion?
The Impasse Between Canon and Criterion
William Abraham or Kierkegaard?
Heniz W. Cassirer—A Personal Testimony

WEEK 11—MAY 6

THE NEW STORY OF SCIENCE
AND ITS THEOLOGICAL RELEVANCE

Topic:

1. New Scientific and Theological Paradigms: Doing Theology in a World of Postmodern Science
2. Does God Know the Future: Some Implications of Relativity Theory

Assignments:

Video: "The Creation of the Universe" (PBS)

Reading:

L. Wood, "Does God the Know the Future? Can God Be Mistaken? A Reply to Richard Swinburne," *The Asbury Theological Journal*. 56.2-57.1 (Fall 2001 – Spring 2002): 24-47

Highly Recommended:

1. Ted Peters, "Theology and Natural Science," in *The Modern Theologians*, edited by David F. Ford, pp. 649-665.

WEEK 12—MAY 3

Topic: What Is Distinctive About The Way John Wesley Did Theology?

Assigned Reading:

Donald Thorsen, *Wesley's Quadrilateral*.

Windows and Icons

While I am sure that each of you are aware of the intended use of each of the items which appear in the ST501X folder, let me summarize the manner in which I intend to use them this semester:

The Course Center will contain a copy of the syllabus as well as all class modules.

The Discussion Center will be used for all public communications. Anytime you have a question or comment about the course, the modules, the assignments, or anything else which would be of interest to your classmates and me, you should post to the Discussion Center.

The ST501X Office is for *private* correspondence between you and me. This will contain items that you do not want to appear publicly before all of your classmates or items that you think may embarrass me if they were to appear publicly.

The Archives Center will be used for storing conversations that have already taken place during the course of the semester. This keeps the *Discussion Center* from becoming too unmanageable.

The Chat Center is intended primarily for real-time interaction among students. You can get together with other members to study, ask questions, or to explore topics. None of the conversations carried on in this location is ever saved.

The Resource Center provides access to a number of specific tools available to all ExL students. These include access to the B.L. Fisher Library, the Services in Estes Chapel, ExL Updates, Guidelines for Success, Helpful Hints, Interesting Links, a Powerpoint Viewer (which you can use to view my overheads) as well as a Real Audio player. I encourage you to take advantage of all these resources, and particularly to utilize the chapel access in order to connect with the seminary's on-campus opportunities for spiritual growth.

For General Information about ExL : *contact* Kevin Osborn or Amy Jo Adams at exlcoord@asburyseminary.edu

For Technical Support with ExL : *contact* Andy Adams at exl_support@asburyseminary.edu

For Library Assistance regarding Book and/or Article Requests : *contact* hannah_kirsch@asburyseminary.edu

For Interlibrary Loan Information : *contact* Dot James at dorothy_james@asburyseminary.edu